

Press Statement

The entire issue of strike at RGNUL started with agitation in mess regarding alleged quality of mess food. However, none of the students complained verbally or in writing to the Warden, Chief Warden, Registrar or the Vice-Chancellor about the mess food or other issues till 13 March. On 13th March 2019, during dinner suddenly some students started banging platters against the mess table. Some of these students had not even tasted the mess food whereas some students were eating and simultaneously banging the platters and eating the food again. After the incident, Dean Student Welfare and Warden Boys Hostel rushed to the spot immediately and conducted an enquiry on the spot against the complaint of bad quality of food, tasted the food and found the food quality to be appropriate. A meeting of Student Mess Committee of the Boys Hostel was also called on the spot wherein the mess contractor was directed to make further improvements in the food quality and mess hygiene.

Simultaneously, the University constituted a committee to enquire into the incident as the banging of plates was not a silent protest. The students banged the plates against the mess tables to the extent of damaging the university property. Many of them were found to have acted in a concerted manner and created nuisance. The video clips were supplied to the committee by certain informers from which some of the students were identified. The committee conducted an urgent and thorough enquiry into the matter after giving a proper opportunity of being heard. The six students who were identified after observing the video clips supplied to the committee by certain informers, were called for hearing on 14th March 2019 and their statements were recorded in writing which were also signed by the six identified students. The statements given by the students were duly recorded and considered. The entire evidence was taken on record. In order to prevent further harm to the University Property, Committee recommended suspension of the six students who are studying in second year of B.A. LL.B. course during the pendency of the enquiry. The suspension of the students on 15th March 2019 was an interim measure subject to the outcome of final inquiry. Further, the suspension order specifically allowed the students to appear in their mid semester examinations.

Suddenly on 15th March 2019 evening, when the students learnt that two esteemed judges of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana are coming in the guest house of RGNUL, the students started gathering outside the guest house. No notice or other communiqué was served on the university before resorting to strike/agitation. The Registrar asked the students to find out the reasons for their gathering but the students resorted to silence and it was inferred that the students are resorting to silent protest. The faculty also joined the Registrar and made an honest effort to identify and solve the grievances of the students. Despite repeated requests of the faculty and the Registrar, students did not budge and did not inform the university authorities and faculty regarding their issues except a letter in writing that the six suspended students be taken back and their suspensions be cancelled. In the letter addressed by the students to the University authorities, students submitted that they apologize for the incident and that the suspension may be revoked and the suspension or any other punishment be given to the students after the exams. The students were informed by the Faculty and the Registrar during the night of 15th March 2019 that the matter is pending with

the Committee and the decision shall be taken immediately in the Morning of 16th March 2019 by calling a meeting of the Committee and that a sympathetic view shall be taken. However, despite such assurances the students did not budge and they continued with their agitation. Since two sitting judges of the High Court were staying in the guest house, the usual security cover as per the protocol was also there including police vehicles. At around 12 midnight, students started raising slogans and blocked the road in front of the guest house. The entire night, faculty members and Registrar kept on assuring the students that the Committee will take a call on your demands next morning immediately but to no avail.

In the morning of 16th March 2019, two Judges of the High Court who had come to Patiala in connection with their official work, spoke to the students and heard the grievances of the students. Both learned judges gave assurances to the students that their genuine demands shall be met. At that time, students raised new demands including that the first paper of mid-semester examinations be postponed; suspension of six students be revoked; administrative officer be suspended; and the in-timing of the girl students in hostels be increased. Judges assured the students that their first three demands will be met (including sending the AO on leave till further orders) and the other issues will be decided by the Committee of Judges along with the Vice-Chancellor subject to the students calling off their agitation. Judges requested the students to call off their agitation. However, despite such assurances, students did not call off their agitation. Thereafter, representative of the Chancellor, Justice Mahesh Grover also spoke to the students and heard their demands and assured them that their first three demands will be met, as above, subject to the condition that students calling off their agitation. However, despite such assurances from the Committee of High Court Judges and also by the Vice-Chancellor, students did not stop their agitation.

Vice-Chancellor along with faculty members again addressed the students on 17th March 2019 also and heard their grievances. During the interaction of the students with the Vice-Chancellor, the students demanded that the suspension of students be revoked immediately; action against the administrative officer be taken; in-timing of the girls hostel be increased till late night and; elected student body be allowed to involve students in participation in university decision making. Vice-Chancellor assured that all the demands will be considered after discussion with the Chancellor immediately and appropriate action will be taken at the earliest and requested the students to end their protest. However, students did not accept the request of the Vice-Chancellor. It is pertinent to mention here that during the interaction of the students with the Hon'ble Judges and with the Vice-Chancellor, the issue of quality of mess food which initiated the strike was never raised.